

Christianity as Mystical Fact by Rudolf Steiner | White Crow Books

Christianity As Mystical Fact was compiled from a series of lectures Rudolf Steiner gave in 1902. It was an attempt to explain the mystical qualities of Christianity and its evolution from pre-Christian times to the resurrection. The book has become one of Steiner's most well known works and it gives us a deeper and richer understanding of the esoteric roots and meaning of Christianity.

Steiner, not satisfied with scratching the surface of traditional Christianity, sought to unearth its mysteries, and his words are reminiscent of a latter day near-death experiencer when he writes in chapter 2; "He acknowledges the existence of the gods, but knows that the ordinary ideas about them do not solve the great problems of existence. He seeks a wisdom, which is jealously guarded by a community of priest-sages. His aspiring soul seeks a refuge in this community. If he is found by the sages to be sufficiently prepared, he is led up by them, step by step, to higher knowledge, in places hidden from the eyes of outward observers. What then happens to him is concealed from the uninitiated. He seems for a time to be entirely removed from earthly life and to be transported into a hidden world.

When he reappears in the light of day a different, quite transformed person is before us. We see a man who cannot find words sublime enough to express the momentous experience through which he has passed. Not merely metaphorically but in a most real sense does he seem to have gone through the gate of death and to have awakened to a new and higher life. He is, moreover, quite certain that no one who has not had a similar experience can understand his words."

Christianity as Mystical Fact is required reading for anyone interested in Christian Mysticism.

About the author

Rudolf Steiner is both a mystic and an occultist. These two natures appear in him in perfect harmony. One could not say which of the two predominates over the other. In intermingling and blending, they have become one homogeneous force. Hence a special development in which outward events play but a secondary part.

Dr. Steiner was born in Upper Austria in 1861. His earliest years were passed in a little town situated on the Leytha, on the borders of Styria, the Carpathians, and Hungary. From childhood his character was serious and concentrated. This was followed by: a youth inwardly illuminated by the most marvellous intuitions, a young manhood encountering terrible trials, and a ripe age crowned by a mission which he had dimly foreseen from his earliest years, but which was only gradually formulated in the struggle for truth and life. This youth passed in a mountainous and secluded region, was happy in its way, thanks to the exceptional faculties that he discovered in himself. He was employed in a Catholic church as a choir boy. The poetry of the worship, the profundity of the symbolism, had a mysterious attraction for him; but, as he possessed the innate gift of seeing souls, one thing terrified him. This was the secret unbelief of the priests, entirely engrossed in the ritual and the material part of

the service. There was another peculiarity: no one, either then or later, allowed himself to talk of any gross superstition in his presence, or to utter any blasphemy, as if those calm and penetrating eyes compelled the speaker to serious thought. In this child, almost always silent, there grew up a quiet and inflexible will, to master things through under standing. That was easier for him than for others, for he possessed from the first that self-mastery, so rare even in the adult, which gives the mastery over others. To this firm will was added a warm, deep, and almost painful sympathy; a kind of pitiful tenderness to all beings and even to inanimate nature. It seemed to him that all souls had in them something divine. But in what a stony crust is, hidden the shining gold! In what hard rock, in what dark gloom lay dormant the precious essence! Vaguely as yet did this idea stir within him — he was to develop it later — that the divine soul is present in all men, but in a latent state. It is a sleeping captive that has to be awakened from enchantment.

To the sight of this young thinker, human souls became transparent, with their troubles, their desires, their paroxysms of hatred or of love. And it was probably owing to the terrible things he saw, that he spoke so little. And yet, what delights, unknown to the world, sprang from this involuntary clairvoyance! Among the remarkable inner revelations of this youth, I will instance only one which was extremely characteristic.

The vast plains of Hungary, the wild Carpathian forests, the old churches of those mountains in which the monstenance glows brightly as a sun in the darkness of the sanctuary, were not there for nothing, but they were helpful to meditation and contemplation.

At fifteen years of age Steiner became acquainted with a herbalist at that time staying in his country. The remarkable thing about this man was that he knew not only the species, families, and life of plants in their minutest details, but also their, secret virtues. One would have said that he had spent his life in conversing with the unconscious and fluid soul of herbs and flowers. He had the gift of seeing the vital principle of plants, their etheric body, and what occultism calls the elementals of the vegetable world. He talked of it as of a quite ordinary and natural thing. The calm and coolly scientific tone of his conversation did but still further excite the curiosity and admiration of the youth. Later on, Steiner knew that this strange man was a messenger from the Master, whom as yet he knew not, but who was to be his real initiator, and who was already watching over him from afar.

What the curious, double-sighted botanist told him, young Steiner found to be in accordance with the logic of things. That did but confirm an inner feeling of long standing, and which more and more forced itself on his mind as the fundamental Law, and as the basis of the Great All. That is to say: the two-fold current which constitutes the very movement of the world, and which might be called the flux and reflux of the universal life.

We are all witnesses and are conscious of the outward current of evolution, which urges onward all beings of heaven and of earth — stars, plants, animals, and humanity — and causes then to move forward towards an infinite future, without our perceiving the initial force which impels then and makes them go on without pause or rest. But there is in the universe an inverse current, which interposes itself and perpetually breaks in on the other. It is that of involution, by which the principles, forces, entities, and souls which come from the invisible world and the kingdom of the Eternal infiltrate and ceaselessly intermingle with the visible reality. No evolution of matter would be comprehensible without this occult and astral current, which is

the great propeller of life, with its hierarchy of powers. Thus the Spirit, which contains the future in germ, involves itself in matter; thus matter, which receives the Spirit, evolves towards the future. While, then, we are moving on blindly towards the unknown future, this future is approaching us consciously, infusing itself in the current of the world and man who elaborate it. Such is the two-fold movement of time, the out-breathing and the in-breathing of the soul of the world, which comes from the Eternal and returns thither.

From the age of eighteen, young Steiner possessed the spontaneous consciousness of this two-fold current — a consciousness that is the condition of all spiritual vision. This vital axiom was forced upon him by a direct and involuntary seeing of things. Thenceforth he had the unmistakable sensation of occult powers which were working behind and through him for his guidance. He gave heed to this force and obeyed its admonitions, for he felt in profound accordance with it.

This kind of perception, however, formed a separate category in his intellectual life. This class of truths seemed to him something so profound, so mysterious, and so sacred, that he never imagined it possible to express it in words. He fed his soul, thereon, as from a divine fountain, but to have scattered, a drop of it beyond would have seemed to him a profanation.

Beside this inner and contemplative life, his rational and philosophic mind was powerfully developing. From sixteen to seventeen years of age, Rudolf Steiner plunged deeply into the study of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling. When he came to Vienna some years after, he became an ardent admirer of Hegel, whose transcendental idealism borders on occultism; but speculative philosophy did not satisfy him. His positive mind demanded the solid basis of the sciences of observation. So he deeply studied mathematics, chemistry, mineralogy, botany, and zoology, “These studies,” he said, “afford a surer basis for the construction of a spiritual system of the universe than history and literature. The latter, wanting in exact methods, would then throw no side-lights on the vast domain of German science.” Inquiring into everything, enamoured of high art, and an enthusiast for poetry, Steiner nevertheless did not neglect literary studies. As a guide therein he found an excellent professor in the person of Julius Schröer, a distinguished scholar of the school of the brothers Grimm, who strove to develop in his pupils the art of oratory and of composition. To this distinguished man the young student owed his great and refined literary culture. “In the desert of prevailing materialism,” says Steiner, “his house was to me an oasis of idealism.”

But this was not yet the Master whom he sought. Amidst these varied studies and deep meditations, he could as yet discern the building of the universe but in a fragmentary way; his inborn intuition prevented any doubt of the divine origin of things and of a spiritual Beyond. A distinctive mark of this extraordinary man was that he never knew any of those crises of doubt and despair which usually accompany the transition to a definite conviction in the life of mystics and of thinkers. Nevertheless, he felt that the central light which illumines and penetrates the whole was still lacking in him. He had reached young manhood, with its terrible problems. What was he going to do with his life? The sphinx of destiny was facing him. How should he solve its problem?

It was at the age of nineteen that the aspirant to the mysteries met with his guide — the Master — so long anticipated.

It is an undoubted fact, admitted by occult tradition and confirmed by experience,

that those who seek the higher truth from an impersonal motive find a master to initiate them at the right moments that is to say, when they are ripe for its reception. “Knock, and it shall be opened to you,” said Jesus. That is true with regard to everything, but above all with regard to truth. Only, the desire must be ardent as a flame, in a soul pure as crystal.

The Master of Rudolf Steiner was one of those men of power who live unknown to the world, under cover of some civil state, to carry out a mission unsuspected by any but their fellows in the Brotherhood of self-sacrificing Masters. They take no ostensible part in human events. To remain unknown is the condition of their power, but their action is only the more efficacious. For they inspire, prepare, and direct those who will act in the sight of all. In the present instance the Master had no difficulty in completing the first and spontaneous initiation of his disciple. He had only, so to speak, to point out to him his own nature, to arm him with his needful weapons. Clearly did he show him the connection between the official and the secret sciences; between the religious and the spiritual forces which are now contending for the guidance of humanity; the antiquity of the occult tradition which holds the hidden threads of history, which mingles them, separates, and reunites them in the course of ages.

Swiftly he made him clear the successive stages of inner discipline, in order to attain conscious and intelligent clairvoyance, In a few months the disciple learned from oral teaching the depth and incomparable splendour of the esoteric synthesis. Rudolf Steiner had already sketched for himself his intellectual mission: “To re-unite Science and Religion. To bring back God into Science, and Nature into Religion. Thus to re fertilize both Art and Life.” But how to set about this vast and daring undertaking? How conquer, or rather, how tame and transform the great enemy, the Materialistic science of the day, which is like a terrible dragon covered with its carapace and couched on its huge treasure? How master this dragon of modern science and yoke it to the car of spiritual truth? And, above all, how conquer the bull of public opinion?

Rudolf Steiner’s Master was not in the least like himself. He had not that extreme and feminine sensibility which, though not excluding energy, makes every contact an emotion and instantly turns the suffering of others into a personal pain. He was masculine in spirit, a born ruler of men, looking only at the species, and for whom individuals hardly existed. He spared not himself, and he did not spare others. His will was like a ball which, once shot from the cannon’s mouth, goes straight to its mark, sweeping off everything in its way. To the anxious questioning of his disciple he replied, in substance:

“If thou wouldst fight the enemy, begin by understanding him, Thou wilt conquer the dragon only by penetrating his skin. As to the bull, thou must seize him by the horns. It is in the extremity of distress that thou wilt find thy weapons and thy brothers in the fight. I have shown thee who thou art, now go — and be thyself!”

Rudolf Steiner knew the language of the Masters well enough to understand the rough path that he was thus commanded to tread; but he also understood, that this was the only way to attain the end. He obeyed, and set forth.

From 1880 the life of Rudolf Steiner becomes divided, into three quite distinct periods: from twenty to thirty years of age (1881 – 1891), the Viennese period, a time of study and of preparation; from thirty to forty (1891 – 1901), the Weimar period, a time of struggle and combat; from forty to forty-six (1901 – 1907), the Berlin period,

a time of action and of organization, in which his thought crystallised into a living work.

I pass rapidly over the Vienna period, in which Steiner took the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. He afterwards wrote a series of scientific articles on zoology, geology, and the theory of colours, in which theosophical ideas appear in an idealist clothing. While acting as tutor in several families, with the same conscientious devotion that he gave to everything, he conducted as chief editor a weekly Viennese paper, the *Deutsche Wochenschrift*. His friendship with the Austrian poetess, Marie Eugénie delle Grazie, cast, as it were, into this period of heavy work a warm ray of sunshine, with a smile of grace and poetry.

In 1890 Steiner was summoned to collaborate in the archives of Goethe and Schiller at Weimar, to superintend the re-editing of Goethe's scientific works. Shortly after, he published two important works, *Truth and Science* and *The Philosophy of Liberty*. "The occult powers that guided me," he says, "forced, me to introduce spiritualistic ideas imperceptibly into the current literature of the time." But in these various tasks he was but studying his ground while trying his strength. So distant was the goal that he did not dream of being able to reach it as yet. To travel round the world in a sailing vessel, to cross the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, in order to return to a European port, would have seemed easier to him. While awaiting the events that would allow him to equip his ship and to launch it on the open sea, he came into touch with two illustrious personalities who helped to determine his intellectual position in the contemporary world.

These two persons were the celebrated philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, and the no less famous naturalist, Ernst Haeckel.

Rudolf Steiner had just written an impartial treatise on the author of *Zarathustra*. In consequence of this, Nietzsche's sister begged the sympathetic critic to come and see her at Naumburg, where her unhappy brother was slowly dying. Madame Foerster took the visitor to the door of the apartment where Nietzsche was lying on a couch in a comatose condition, inert, stupefied. To Steiner there was something very significant in this melancholy sight. In it he saw the final act in the tragedy of the would-be superman.

Nietzsche, the author of *Beyond Good and Evil* had not, like the realists of Bismarckian imperialism, renounced idealism, for he was naturally intuitive; but in his individualistic pride he sought to cut off the spiritual world from the universe, and the divine from human consciousness. Instead of placing the superman, of whom he had a poetic vision, in the spiritual kingdom, which is his true sphere, he strove to force him into the material world, which alone was real in his eyes. Hence, in that splendid intellect arose a chaos of ideas and a wild struggle which finally brought on softening of the brain. To explain this particular case, it is needless to bring in atavism or the theory of degeneracy. The frenzied combat of ideas and of contradictory sentiments, of which this brain was the battlefield, was enough. Steiner had done justice to all the genius that marked the innovating ideas of Nietzsche, but this victim of pride, self-destroyed by negation, was to him none the less a tragic instance of the ruin of a mighty intellect which madly destroys itself in breaking away from spiritual intelligence.

Madame Foerster did her utmost to enroll Dr. Steiner under her brother's flag. For this she used all her skill, making repeated offers to the young publicist to become editor and commentator of Nietzsche's works. Steiner withstood her insistence as

best he could, and ended by taking himself off altogether, for which Madame Foerster never forgave him. She did not know that Rudolf Steiner bore within him the consciousness of a work no less great and more valuable than that of her brother.

Nietzsche had been merely an interesting episode in the life of the esoteric thinker on the threshold of his battlefield. His meeting with the celebrated naturalist, Ernst Haeckel, on the contrary, marks a most important phase in the development of his thought. Was not the successor of Darwin apparently the most formidable adversary of the spiritualism of this young initiate, of that philosophy which to him was the very essence of his being and the breath of his thought? Indeed, since the broken link between man and animal has been re-joined, since man can no longer believe in a special and supernatural origin, he has begun altogether to doubt his divine origin and destiny. He no longer sees himself as anything but one phenomenon among so many phenomena, a passing form amidst so many forms, a frail and chance link in a blind evolution. Steiner, then, is right in saying; "The mentality deduced from natural sciences is the greatest power of modern times." On the other hand, he knew that this system merely reproduces a succession of external forms among, living beings, and not the inner and acting forces of life. He knew it from personal initiation, and a deeper and vaster view of the universe. So also he could exclaim with more assurance than most of our timid spiritualists and startled theologians: "Is the human soul then to rise on the wings of enthusiasm to the summits of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good, only to be swept away into nothingness, like a bubble of the brain?" Yes, Haeckel was the Adversary. It was materialism in arms, the dragon with all his scales, his claws, and his teeth.

Steiner's desire to understand this man and to do him justice as to all that was great in him, to fathom his theory so far as it was logical and plausible, was only the more intense. In this fact one sees all the loyalty and all the greatness of his comprehensive mind.

The materialistic conclusions of Haeckel could have no influence on his own ideas which came to him from a different science; but he had a presentiment that in the indisputable discoveries of the naturalist he should find the surest basis of an evolutionary spiritualism and a rational theosophy.

He began, then, to study eagerly the History of Natural Creation. In it Haeckel gives a fascinating picture of the evolution of species, from the amoeba to man. In it he shows the successive growth of organs, and the physiological process by which living beings have raised themselves to organisms more and more complex and more and more perfect. But in this stupendous transformation, which implies millions and millions of years, he never explains the initial force of this universal ascent, nor the series of special impulses which cause beings to rise step by step. To these primordial questions, Haeckel has never been able to reply except by admitting spontaneous generation, which is tantamount to a miracle as great as the creation of man by God from a clod of earth. To a theosophist like Steiner, on the other hand, the cosmic force which elaborates the world comprises in its spheres, fitted one into another, the myriad's of souls which crystallise and incarnate ceaselessly in all beings. He, who saw the underside of creation, could but recognise and admire the extent, of the all-round gaze with which Haeckel surveyed his above. It was in vain that the naturalist would deny the divine Author of the universal schemes he proved it in spite of himself, in so well describing His work. As to the theosophist, he greeted, in the surging of species and in the breath which urges them onward — Man in the making, the very thought of God the visible expression of the planetary Word.

While thus pursuing his studies, Rudolf Steiner recalled the saying of his Masters “To conquer the dragon, his skin must be penetrated.” While stealing within the carapace of present-day materialism, he had seized his weapons. Henceforth he was ready for the combat. He needed but a field of action to give battle, and a powerful aid to uphold him therein. He was to find his field in the Theosophical Society, and his aid in a remarkable woman.

In 1897 Rudolf Steiner went to Berlin to conduct a literary magazine, and to give lectures there.

On his arrival, he found there a branch of the Theosophical Society. The German branch of this Society was always noted for its great independence, which is natural in a country of transcendental philosophy and of fastidious criticism. It had already made a considerable contribution to occult literature through the interesting periodical, *The Sphinx*, conducted by Dr. Hübbe-Schleiden, and Dr. Carl du Prel’s book — *Philosophie der Mystik*. But, the leaders having retired, it was almost over with the group. Great discussions and petty wranglings divided the theosophists beyond the Rhine. Should Rudolf Steiner enter the Theosophical Society? This question forced itself urgently upon him, and it was of the utmost gravity, both for himself and for his cause.

Through his first Master, through the brotherhood with which he was associated, and by his own innermost nature, Steiner belongs to another school of occultism, I mean to the esoteric Christianity of the West, and most especially to the Rosicrucian initiation.

After careful consideration he resolved to join the Theosophical Society of which he became a member in 1902. He did not, however, enter it as a pupil of the Eastern tradition, but as an initiate of Rosicrucian esotericism who gladly recognised the profound depth of the Hindu Wisdom and offered it a brotherly hand to make a magnetic link between the two. He understood that the two traditions were not meant to contend with each other, but to act in concert, with complete independence, and thus to work for the common good of civilisation. The Hindu tradition, in fact, contains the greatest treasure of occult science as regards cosmogony and the prehistoric periods of humanity, while the tradition of Christian and Western esotericism looks from its immeasurable height upon the far-off future and the final destinies of our race. For the past contains and prepares the future, as the future issues from the past and completes it.

Rudolf Steiner was assisted in his work by a powerful recruit and one of inestimable value in the propagandist work that he was about to undertake.

Mlle. Marie von Sivers, a Russian by birth, and of an unusually varied cosmopolitan education (she writes and speaks Russian, French, German, and English equally well), had herself also reached Theosophy by other roads, after long seeking for the truth which illumines all because it illumines the very depths of our own being. The extreme refinement of her aristocratic nature, at once modest and proud, her great and delicate sensitiveness, the extent and balance of her intelligence, her artistic and mental endowments, all made her wonderfully fitted for the part of an agent and an apostle. The Oriental theosophy had attracted and delighted her without altogether convincing her. The lectures of Dr. Steiner gave her the light which convinces by casting its beams on all sides, as from a transplendent centre. Independent and free, she, like many Russians in good society, sought for some ideal work to which she could devote all her energies. She had found it. Dr. Steiner having been appointed

General Secretary of the German Section of the Theosophical Society, Mlle. Marie von Sivers became his assistant. From that time, in spreading the work throughout Germany and the adjacent countries, she displayed a real genius for organisation, maintained with unwearied activity.

As for Rudolf Steiner, he had already given ample proof of his profound thought and his eloquence. He knew himself, and he was master of himself. But such faith, such devotion must have increased his energy a hundred-fold, and given wings to his words. His writings on esoteric questions followed one another in rapid succession.

He delivered lectures in Berlin, Leipzig, Cassel, Munich, Stuttgart, Vienna, Budapest, etc. All his books are of a high standard. He is equally skilled in the deduction of ideas in philosophical order, and in rigorous analysis of scientific facts. And when he so chooses, he can give a poetical form to his thought, in original and striking imagery. But his whole self is shown only by his presence and his speech, private or public. The characteristic of his eloquence is a singular force, always gentle in expression, resulting undoubtedly from perfect serenity of soul combined with wonderful clearness of mind. Added to this at times is an inner and mysterious vibration which makes itself felt by the listener from the very first words. Never a word that could shock or jar. From argument to argument, from analogy to analogy, he leads you on from the known, to the unknown. Whether following up the comparative development of the earth and of man, according to occult tradition, through the Lemurian, Atlantean, Asiatic, and European periods; whether explaining the physiological and psychic constitution of man as he now is; whether enumerating the stages of Rosicrucian initiation, or commenting on the Gospel of St. John and the Apocalypse, or applying his root-ideas to mythology, history, and literature, that which dominates and guides his discourse is ever this power of synthesis, which coordinates facts under one ruling idea and gathers them together in one harmonious vision. And it is ever this inward and contagious fervour this secret music of the soul, which is, as it were, a subtle melody in harmony with the Universal Soul.

Such, at least, is what I felt on first meeting him and listening to him two years ago. I could not better describe this undefinable feeling than by recalling, the saying of a poet-friend to whom I was showing the portrait of the German theosophist. Standing before those deep and clear-seeing eyes, before that countenance, hollowed by inward struggles, moulded by a lofty spirit which has proved its balance on the heights and its calm in the depths, my friend exclaimed: "Behold a master of himself and of life!"

Edouard Schuré 1908

Sample chapter

CHAPTER 1

POINTS OF VIEW

Natural Science has deeply influenced modern thought.

It is becoming more and more impossible to speak of spiritual needs and the life of the soul, without taking into consideration the achievements and methods of this science. It must be admitted, however, that many people satisfy these needs, without letting themselves be troubled by its influence. But those who feel the beating of the

pulse of the age must take this influence into consideration. With increasing swiftness do ideas derived from natural science take possession of our brains, and, unwillingly though it may be, our hearts follow, often in dejection and dismay. It is not a question only of the number thus won over, but of the fact that there is a force within the method of natural science, which convinces the attentive observer that that method contains something which cannot be neglected, and is one by which any modern conception of the universe must be profoundly affected. Many of the outgrowths of this method compel a justifiable rejection. But such rejection is not sufficient in an age in which very many resort to this way of thinking, and are attracted to it as if by magic.

The case is in no way altered because some people see that true science long ago passed, by its own initiative, beyond the shallow doctrines of force and matter taught by materialists. It would be better, apparently, to listen to those who boldly declare that the ideas of natural science will form the basis of a new religion. If these ideas also appear shallow and superficial to one who knows the deeper spiritual needs of humanity, he must nevertheless take note of them, for it is to them that attention is now turned, and there is reason to think they will claim more and more notice in the near future.

Another class of people have also to be taken into account, those whose hearts have lagged behind their heads. With their reason they cannot but accept the ideas of natural science. The burden of proof is too much for them. But those ideas cannot satisfy the religious needs of their souls; the perspective offered is too dreary. Is the human soul to rise on the wings of enthusiasm to the heights of beauty, truth, and goodness, only for each individual to be swept away in the end like a bubble blown by the material brain? This is a feeling, which oppresses many minds like a nightmare. But scientific concepts oppress them also, coming as they do come with the mighty force of authority. As long as they can, these people remain blind to the discord in their souls. Indeed they console themselves by saying that full clearness in these matters is denied to the human soul. They think in accordance with natural science so long as the experience of their senses and the logic of their intellect demand it, but they keep to the religious sentiments in which they have been educated, and prefer to remain in darkness as to these matters, — a darkness which clouds their understanding. They have not the courage to battle through to the light.

There can be no doubt whatever that the habit of thought derived from natural science is the greatest force in modern intellectual life, and it must not be passed by heedlessly by anyone concerned with the spiritual interests of humanity. But it is none the less true that the way in which it sets about satisfying spiritual needs is superficial and shallow. If this were the right way, the outlook would indeed be dreary. Would it not be depressing to be obliged to agree with those who say: "Thought is a form of force. We walk by means of the same force by which we think. Man is an organism which transforms various forms of force into thought-force, an organism the activity of which we maintain by what we call 'food,' and with which we produce what we call 'thought.' What a marvelous chemical process it is which could change a certain quantity of food into the divine tragedy of Hamlet." This is quoted from a pamphlet of Robert G. Ingersoll, bearing the title, *Modern Twilight of the Gods*. It matters little if such thoughts find but scanty acceptance in the outside world. The point is that innumerable people find themselves compelled by the system of natural science to take up with regard to world processes, an attitude in conformity with the above, even when they think they are not doing so.

It would certainly be a dreary outlook if natural science itself compelled us to accept

the creed proclaimed by many of its modern prophets. Most dreary of all for one who has gained, from the content of natural science, the conviction that in its own sphere its mode of thought holds good and its methods are unassailable. For he is driven to make the admission that, however much people may dispute about individual questions, though volume after volume may be written, and thousands of observations accumulated about the struggle for existence and its insignificance, about the omnipotence or powerlessness of natural selection, natural science itself is moving in a direction which, within certain limits, must find acceptance in a never increasing degree. 1

But are the demands made by natural science really such as they are described by some of its representatives? That they are not so is proved by the method employed by these representatives themselves. The method they use in their own sphere is not such as is often described, and claimed for other spheres of thought. Would Darwin and Ernst Haeckel ever have made their great discoveries about the evolution of life if, instead of observing life and the structure of living beings, they had shut themselves up in a laboratory and there made chemical experiments with tissue cut out of an organism? Would Lyell have been able to describe the development of the crust of the earth if, instead of examining strata and their contents, he had scrutinized the chemical qualities of innumerable rocks? Let us really follow in the footsteps of these investigators who tower like giants in the domain of modern science. We shall then apply to the higher regions of spiritual life the methods they have used in the study of nature. We shall not then believe we have understood the nature of the "divine" tragedy of Hamlet by saying that a wonderful chemical process transformed a certain quantity of food into that tragedy. We shall believe it as little as an investigator of nature could seriously believe that he has understood the mission of heat in the evolution of the earth, when he has studied the action of heat on sulphur in a retort. Neither does he attempt to understand the construction of the human brain by examining the effect of liquid potash on a fragment of it, but rather by inquiring how the brain has, in the course of evolution, been developed out of the organs of lower organisms.

It is therefore quite true that one who is investigating the nature of spirit can do nothing better than learn from natural science. He need only do as science does, but he must not allow himself to be misled by what individual representatives of natural science would dictate to him. He must investigate in the spiritual as they do in the physical domain, but he need not adopt the opinions they entertain about the spiritual world, confused as they are by their exclusive contemplation of physical phenomena.

We shall only be acting in the spirit of natural science if we study the spiritual development of man as impartially as the naturalist observes the sense-world. We shall then certainly be led, in the domain of spiritual life, to a kind of contemplation, which differs from that of the naturalist as geology differs from pure physics and biology from chemistry. We shall be led up to higher methods, which cannot, it is true, and be those of natural science, though quite conformable with the spirit of it. Such methods alone are able to bring us to the heart of spiritual developments, such as that of Christianity, or other worlds of religious conceptions. Anyone applying these methods may arouse the opposition of many who believe they are thinking scientifically, but he will know himself, for all that, to be in full accord with a genuinely scientific method of thought.

An investigator of this kind must also go beyond a merely historical examination of

the documents relating to spiritual life. This is necessary just on account of the attitude he has acquired from his study of natural history. When a chemical law is explained, it is of small use to describe the retorts, dishes, and pincers which have lent to the discovery of the law. And it is just as useless, when explaining the origin of Christianity, to ascertain the historical sources drawn upon by the Evangelist St. Luke, or those from which the “hidden revelation” of St. John is compiled. History can in this case be only the outer court to research proper. It is not by tracing the historical origin of documents that we shall discover anything about the dominant ideas in the writings of Moses or in the traditions of the Greek mystics. These documents are only the outer expression forth ideas. Nor does the naturalist who is investigating the nature of man trouble about the origin of the word “man,” or the way in which it has developed in a language. He keeps to the thing, not to the word in which it finds expression. And in studying spiritual life we must likewise abide by the spirit and not by outer documents. 2

1 To one who has true perception, the “Spirit of Nature” speaks powerfully in the facts currently expressed by the catchword, “struggle for existence,” etc., but not in the opinions which modern science deduces from them. In the first statement lies the reason why natural science is attracting more and more widespread attention. But it follows from the second statement that scientific opinions should not be taken as if they necessarily belonged to a knowledge of facts. The possibility of being led astray by mere opinion is, in these days, infinitely great.

2 It should not be concluded from these remarks about the sources of St. Luke’s Gospel, that purely historical research is undervalued by the writer of this book. This is not the case. Historical research is absolutely justified, but it should not be impatient with the method of presentation proceeding from a spiritual point of view. It is not considered of importance to make various kinds of quotations in this book; but one who is willing will be able to see that a really unprejudiced, broad-minded judgment will not find anything that is here stated to be contrary to what has been actually and historically proved. One who will not be broad minded, but who holds this or that theory to be a firmly established fact, may easily think that assertions made in this book are untenable from a scientific point of view, and are made without any objective foundation.

Publisher: White Crow Books

Published January 2012

124 pages

Size: 229 x 152 mm

ISBN 978-1-907661-68-6